

Murszewski, Peter

From: Nancy Hadley <nancy@hadleygroupllc.com>
Sent: Saturday, February 09, 2013 6:16 PM
To: Murszewski, Peter
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Subject: HB 5724 An Act prohibiting municipal Employees from serving on the legislative body where the legislative body has the responsibilities and authority of a board of finance

To: Members of the Planning and Development Committee
RE: Testimony regarding HB 5724: An Act prohibiting municipal from serving on the legislative body of a municipality....

“That subsection (e) of section 7-421 of the general statutes be amended to prohibit municipal employees from serving on the legislative body of a municipality if such legislative body has the responsibilities and authority of a board of finance and if such prohibition is set forth in the municipality’s charter.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify in support of HB 5724. I am unable to attend the Wednesday, February 14th public hearing on this bill. Therefore I respectfully request that you enter my testimony for the record.

My name is Nancy L. Hadley. I have lived in Downtown Bridgeport for the past five years. I also served as Bridgeport’s Director of Planning and Economic Development during the Fabrizi Administration. During the Weicker Administration, I served as Deputy Transportation Commissioner at the Connecticut Department of Transportation and Commissioner of Motor Vehicles. For the past year, I have been honored to serve as Executive Director of The Mutual Housing Association of Southwestern Connecticut Inc., a mid-size affordable housing non-profit corporation that owns and self manages over 400 affordable housing units in Southwestern Connecticut. Five of MHA’s properties are located in Bridgeport and are paying full property taxes. Today, I am writing you as a Bridgeport resident and former Bridgeport Planning and Economic Development Director.

The purpose of HB 5724 is to prohibit municipal workers from serving on a municipal council where the legislative body has the fiduciary responsibilities of a Board of Finance. Of the State’s 169 municipalities, 21 are consolidated City/Town structures. Most if not all of the remaining 148 Towns have a Representative Town Meeting form of government with Boards of Finance. Of the 21 consolidated City/Town structures, it is my understanding that Bridgeport is the only one in this category that does not have an elected Board of Finance or similar type board responsible to set the municipal budget including positions, classes and salaries; labor contracts which contain the work rules, layoff and hiring protocols, mill rates, and the overall fiduciary oversight of the municipality’s fiscal health. Those responsibilities fall to the twenty-member Bridgeport City Council.

Currently six of the 20 City Council members work for the City including the Board of Education. To complicate matters further, many of the Bridgeport City Council members have immediate family members; mother, father, sister, brother, son, son-in-law, daughter, daughter-in-law, spouse and domestic partner working for the City including the Board of Education. I am told at least an additional third of the City Council members have immediate family members that work for the City including the Board of Education. Therefore over two thirds of Bridgeport’s City Council members vote on salaries, raises, and the conditions of work for themselves and their immediate family members. Now, I respect those

that serve as members of the City Council. I truly do. They have to put in long hours of volunteer time. However, the actual if not perceived conflict of interest is self evident. When someone serves on a legislative body, they must have one master; the greater good of the residents and property owners of the municipality. As a resident, I expect the City Council to serve the greater good at all times. HB 5724 will end this practice of dual interests.

The 2012 Bridgeport Charter Revision Commission did not recommend creating a separate elected Board of Finance. The Charter Revision Commission did not change the long standing language in the City's Charter that prohibits City Council members from working or consulting for the City including the Board of Education. State law trumps local law therefore the City Charter language has been ignored for decades. The perceived if not actual conflicts of interests will continue unless HB 5724 becomes law.

Some have postured that passing HB 4724 will reduce the pool of candidates for elected office. Now, maybe that could be a situation for one of the 148 smaller Connecticut towns. However, in a consolidated City/Town structure, I respectfully disagree. In the case of Bridgeport, the largest city in the State, there is a huge pool of potential candidates. Over 20,000 voters participated in the electoral process last November. That is a pretty large potential pool. It is my opinion that the incestuous relationship that is currently in place on the City Council keeps independent thinking, hardworking members of the community from engaging in elected public service. It is my belief that passing HB 5724, grandfathering the incumbents until the next full election cycle, i.e. November 2014 would send a signal that Bridgeport's City Charter is being respected and the best and brightest are encouraged to enter the political process.

From an economic development standpoint and property owner, the critical issue is the economic bottom line. Bridgeport's mill rate, set by the City Council and Mayor, exceeds 41 mills, far above our surrounding neighbors. Bridgeport's property taxes are very high. Every penny counts. Therefore hard decisions need to be made. It is my opinion that developers interested in investing in Bridgeport have a difficult challenge deciding to invest in Bridgeport with such a high mill rate. Essential tax abatement agreements become additional challenges for the Mayor and City Council. It is also very difficult for residential property owners to maintain affordable rents with such a high mill rate. In my personal opinion, the perceived if not actual conflicts cloud Bridgeport's fiscal decision making process. The language of the City Charter must take precedence.

I encourage you to support HB 5724. I recommend expanding the prohibition to include immediate family members. I also recommend restricting the bill to the 21 consolidated city/town structures. Finally, I recommend the effective date to coincide with the November 2014 election to give all those concerned time to adjust.

Sincerely,

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